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COORDINATING COMMITTEEMEMORANDUM BY THE FRENCH DELEGATION

4287176

EXPORT TO THE U.S.S.R. OF A PROCESS FOR THE PRODUCTION OF ISOPRENE

The French Delegation have the honour to inform the Committee that the French Petroleum Institute have succeeded in their laboratories, and at prototype level, in producing synthetic isoprene from isobutene and formol. Although there has not yet been any manufacture on an industrial scale using the I.F.P. process, there is every reason to anticipate that this could be done in conditions enabling competitive production, by polymerization, of a synthetic rubber whose qualities would be close to those of natural rubber and thus, for a number of uses, superior to those of the synthetic rubbers now on the market.

To carry out the polymerization, there are several processes in existence which have been fully tested and are working on a semi-industrial scale. The reason why these processes have not yet been fully utilised is that, up to the present, isoprene has been too expensive to make the polyisoprene rubbers competitive as against other rubbers. The work of the I.F.P. will now enable these new products to be manufactured economically.

During a recent visit to the French Petroleum Institute by a Russian Delegation and a Roumanian Delegation, the visitors took a keen interest in this process.

Isoprene does not appear on the Committee's embargo lists. This absence is not the result of any omission. Isoprene is a well-known chemical product used as a raw material for the production of certain synthetic products such as butyl rubber, which does not appear on List I either. No one therefore could oppose the conclusion of this contract on the grounds of Administrative Principle No. 5, calling upon Member Governments so far as practicable to avoid "the export of technical data, technical assistance, and any other technology applicable to the design, production and use of embargoed items".

Soviet production of synthetic rubber, however, amounted to approximately 300,000 tons in 1958 and, in accordance with the 7-year Plan, should be multiplied two-and-a-half times in 1965. The Soviets complain of the clearly inadequate production range and quality of their synthetic rubbers, and it would seem that they can only fulfil their plans through the purchase of Western manufacturing processes.

The handing-over to the U.S.S.R. of a process enabling the manufacture of a synthetic rubber of a higher quality than that of the synthetic rubber on the market at present has caused some apprehension in the competent French departments.

The French Delegation would therefore be glad to have the views of the Coordinating Committee on a possible delivery of this process. In the event of unfavourable views being expressed, the French authorities would comply with them on condition that all the Governments represented on the Committee undertook not to deliver to Eastern Powers other new processes for the manufacture of isoprene.

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